WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: CJ Gray Grafton Scarlet

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: 27 July 2015

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is July 27, 2015. My name is Therese Strohmer, and I'm with CJ Scarlet in Cary, North Carolina to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veteran's Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina of Greensboro. So CJ, would you like to state your name the way you would like it to read on your collection?

CS: Cynthia Joyce Scarlet Walters.

TS: Okay, let's check that. Okay, we might want to fix that. What was it again?

CS: CJ Gray Grafton Scarlet.

TS: Okay. Thank you. Sorry about that. Well, CJ, why don't we start a little bit—did you want to pause for a second?—

CS: No.

TS: Okay.

CS: No.

TS: —by having you tell me a little bit about when and where you were born?

CS: I was born April 13, 1961 at Camp Pendleton, California, at the Marine base where my father was stationed.

TS: And so, you grew up, kind of, a Marine brat. Is that right?

CS: I definitely grew up as a Marine brat. We were stationed—We left Camp Pendleton and went to Barstow, California, in the Mojave Desert. My dad was in supply and logistics. And then when he went overseas to Okinawa [Japan], we lived in Connecticut, and then

we went back to Barstow, and then we went back to Connecticut. And then he—when he got out of service he moved us to Arkansas.

TS: Okay. Did you have any brothers and sisters?

CS: I have five brothers and sisters, including a twin brother. So I was the third daughter, twin sister of the first born son, so I didn't stand a lick in hell of getting any attention.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: No.

CS: So I became the superstar.

TS: [chuckles] That's awesome.

CS: The one everybody had to pay attention to. I was always out there going, "Watch me, watch me. Look at me, look at me."

We loved living on the military bases. They were—This is base housing back in the sixties so it wasn't glori—grand housing by any stretch of the imagination, but we used to play in the sprinklers, and we thought we were living big because we didn't have any ice cream trucks or things like that that came around, but we had airplanes that flew overhead, and bombs that went off all the time, and—

TS: You had bombs that went off all the time?

CS: In the mornings about—the artillery range. In the mornings—about five o'clock in the morning—you'd here this deep boom, boom, boom, and you could feel it before you could hear it. And I remember dreaming that there were giants coming to get me.

TS: Like that vibration and—

CS: Because of the vibration and the sound. But I was never that afraid of the giants because I knew it was the artillery, but when the aircraft would go over that would—that would scare me.

TS: Yeah.

CS: The aircraft, they would do, sort of, the map of the earth flying, and they would come over really low. We had—At one point in Barstow we had to a kitty cat named Kiki the vampire cat, and Kiki was named the vampire cat because when the aircraft would go overhead Kiki would jump on your shoulder and bite your neck.

TS: [chuckles] Scared?

CS: Every single time.

TS: Just scared. Yeah.

CS: [chuckles] Yeah.

TS: Oh, had to blame somebody for that trauma.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

CS: Had to blame somebody for that. But the military bases were great, and a great place for us to live, and this is the early sixties when a lot of things weren't integrated, but the military bases and the schools on the military bases were. So I grew up in an integrated society not knowing that there was a civil rights movement going on.

TS: No, really?

CS: I didn't—

TS: Where were you stationed that there might have been, like, off the base, something like that going on?

CS: In Camp Pendleton, I remember one—I mean Barstow. I remember one time—

TS: In California.

CS: —my twin brother and I had to go off base to the day care center, and we were supposed to ride a bus from the school to the day care center. And we got on the bus, and there were a bunch of adults—African Americans—and they started screaming at us and throwing things at us, and saying, "Get to the back of the bus; sit in the back of the bus; sit in the back of the bus." And we were terrified. We were, like, six years old.

So we went and sat in the back of the bus, and I had no idea—this was probably when the Watts riots were going on or something to do with the civil rights movement was going on—but anyway, these very angry African American people made us sit in the back of the bus, and we didn't—that was my one little tiny piece of the civil rights movement.

[The Watts riots took place in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, California, from 11-16 August 1965. The community was acting out against alleged police brutality, and the riots are blamed primarily on police racism. The riots resulted in thirty-four deaths, and forty million dollars in property damage. At the time, it was considered the worst instance of civil unrest in Los Angeles]

TS: Kind of like as a resistance against you as a young white person.

CS: As a white person. Yeah. Yeah.

TS: That's interesting.

CS: But to do that to two little kids that was pretty bad.

TS: Yeah.

CS: But we grew up—Hispanics, and African Americans, and we were just all best buddies, and we just—that was in the days where you left in the morning—when school was out you would leave first thing in the morning, and not come home until lunch, and then disappear, and not come home until it was dark.

TS: Yeah.

CS: And your mom was calling for you to come to dinner. And living in the desert in Barstow we would chase iguanas, and sidewinders [snakes], and hope we'd never ran into tarantulas and scorpions and things like that, although we did sometimes. It was just fun. I loved—I loved military life. I loved growing up in the military.

TS: Now, what about your mom? Did she stay home or did she work outside the home?

CS: She stayed at home. Now, she had five kids in a six-year period.

TS: That's pretty—

CS: And my dad worked three jobs—

TS: —pretty good.

CS: —to keep us going, because the military obviously didn't pay very much and he was just a sergeant. And so, he was working two or three jobs, and she was raising five kids ranging from six and four to thirteen months, and brand new—newborn baby. And quite frankly, I don't know how on earth she did it. Now that I'm the grandmother of twins, and I see how much work it takes just for two babies, I can't imagine doing it with five. And she didn't drive—

TS: Oh, she didn't.

CS: —for the longest time.

TS: No?

CS: Yeah. She eventually learned to drive, but she would take us on the bus to go to the commissary to go shopping. With five kids—

TS: Get on and get off.

CS: I don't know how she just didn't smother us all with a pillow in our sleep.

TS: [chuckles] Because she loved you.

CS: Yes, fortunately. They always used to threaten to give me back to the Indians [Native Americans], which wasn't a fun thing to say to a little kid because in the Mojave Desert the Indians lived around there, so I literally thought they were going to give me back to the Indians.

TS: Right.

CS: Tried to be good but—fortunately they never gave me back to the Indians.

TS: Well, I'm sure looking back you have a view of that time growing up. And do you remember as a young girl—I'm sure it felt—this was just your life, and it was what you knew, right?

CS: Yes.

TS: Did you think about things, like what was going on in the world at all, or were you more like localized to what was happening in my neighborhood? Do you remember things like that?

CS: I remember the evening news coming on with news about the Vietnamese—the Vietnam War. And my parents didn't talk to us about what was going on, but I knew that the war was violent, and angry, and I hated it when the news would come on because I would just hear gun shots, and see these scenes on TV, and it was—it was terrifying. But for the most part we were pretty isolated. My parents had us pretty isolated from all that stuff.

Now, I remember when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. I remember that moment very well. We were in Barstow. My sister had just broke her arm, and then—and then we got to watch him walk on the moon. That was pretty cool. That was in Barstow too.

TS: Yeah. Lots of stuff happened in Barstow.

CS: So yeah, I was largely oblivious to what was going on in the world, even when we were in Connecticut. My dad went on recruiting duty in Westport, Connecticut, and the Vietnam War was just flaring, and I knew stuff was happening. We would see the protest parades—the protesters and the parades—and I remember one parade they had women with white sheets on, with their faces white, holding what were supposed to be dead

babies in their arms, marching against the Vietnamese—the Vietnam War. And my mother just sobbing on the street corner because they were being anti-American. And of course, I grew up being very—in a very conservative household; take a bullet for Ronny [President Ronald Wilson] Reagan; go out there and get the bad guys. And now, I'm a total pacifist.

TS: Is that right?

CS: It's so funny. I've gone full circle. I couldn't shoot anybody unless they were going to harm someone I loved.

TS: Well, we'll have to talk about how you came around to that.

CS: Yeah.

TS: That's interesting. So you're growing up on a military bases—

CS: Military bases.

TS: —and you're going to military schools?

CS: Yes, except in Westport; we went to a civilian school.

TS: Okay, was that different at all for you?

CS: Oh, it was very different. We lived in Westport, which is an extremely wealthy veteran community from New York City. In fact, one of the most expensive communities—veteran communities up there in the northeast. And we had one street that had all the recruiters and their families living on it. And so, there were probably fifteen houses, maybe sixteen houses, and it was—it was nice little houses. They were small though. But that was considered the slums of Westport.

TS: Okay.

CS: Because it was not—it wasn't one of those—they weren't those gorgeous homes. We were treated a little differently as military brats in Westport, and it was a strange experience because I didn't—again I'd been raised with people of all races, and going to school with them, and there was one black child who went to school with me in Westport; one black child out of the entire school. And I just can't imagine what that experience must have been like for that boy. But for me, it was really strange not to see more diversity because that was just what I was used to.

TS: It was pretty white?

CS: Yeah, very much so.

TS: Yeah. How was the education?

CS: It was all good. I don't remember anything standing out about the teaching.

TS: Do you—

CS: The educational process at all.

TS: How do you feel about the education received growing up on the military bases?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

CS: On the military bases?

TS: Yes.

CS: I thought it was good. I only went to military schools up until the age of nine—nine. And I loved the schools I went to. The school—I went back—The summer before last I went back to California, back to Barstow, took a look and the school I went to was still there—with the boy's bathroom that I snuck into; was still there. And—

TS: Why'd you sneak into the boy's bathroom?

CS: Because someone dared me to.

TS: Oh, okay.

CS: And I thought it was just the most awful thing you could do, and so I did it. Came out screaming because it was so weird to go into the boy's bathroom. [chuckles]

TS: See the urinals and—

CS: See the urinals; the first time I'd ever seen anything like that in my life. I didn't even know what they were.

TS: Yeah.

CS: I was always doing the unexpected.

TS: Oh, yeah. Well, you're trying to do the attention thing still, right?

CS: Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

TS: Did you play any sports or did you—

CS: They didn't have sports for girls back then. We still—For the most part, we still wore dresses to school, and that was always fun on the monkey bars. The boys following the girls around because their dresses would fall over their heads on the monkey bars. No, there was no such thing as sports for girls. I remember the boys would play baseball around the—just in the neighborhood, and they wouldn't let me play, and I was very much a tomboy. I was so upset that they wouldn't let me play these sports, and it wasn't until I went to Connecticut, and was at that school, that I was introduced to gymnastics, and things like that.

TS: Okay.

CS: That I even knew they had sports for girls. And then when I moved to Arkansas there were—it was back to nothing for girls.

TS: What age were you when you got to Arkansas?

CS: I was twelve.

TS: Okay.

CS: And Title IX had just been enacted. They had gymnastics team, but they ended up taking that away from us, too, which was unfortunate.

[Title IX was a component of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, and states in part that: No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance]

TS: So you didn't get to participate in anything.

CS: Yeah, I was a gymnast for a little while.

TS: Yeah.

CS: And I—I competed in state tournaments just because there was so little representation from our little town, but my father was convinced that I could have been an Olympic gymnast if they hadn't taken the sports program away. And to this day, he'll swear that I could have been an Olympiad.

TS: That's great support.

CS: An Olympian. I'm like, "Dad, I wasn't that good."
He's like, "No, no, no, you could have done it; you could have done it."

TS: "You could have been a contender."

CS: I could have been a contender.

TS: [chuckles] That's kind of neat.

CS: Yeah.

TS: Well, did you have a favorite teacher or anything along those lines, or subject even?

CS: Mrs. Randle was our third grade teacher and—

TS: Where was that at?

CS: In Barstow.

TS: Okay.

CS: And she read *Mrs. Piggle Wiggle* books [by Betty MacDonald] to us, and I remember working on my numbers, and learning to read, and doing all those things, at an older age than when my children did them. My older son learned to read at two, my younger son learned to read at five before he went to kindergarten, and they knew their colors, and their numbers, and their math, and everything else before they ever went to school. And when we were there, we were just learning basic *Susie and Tommy*, and *Dick and Jane*, and things like that. It was very simplistic stuff we were learning.

[*Susie and Tommy*, and *Dick and Jane* were popular books used to teach children reading]

TS: It's a little more accelerated now a days.

CS: It's much more accelerated. School is so much harder now than it was when I was in. But I loved school. I would have—if I had known that I could have gotten into science, if I'd known anything about science, I would have just gone in that direction. My life would have taken a totally different trajectory.

TS: Oh, really?

CS: Yeah.

TS: What do you mean? You didn't have science or—

CS: We had basic science. I don't remember a science class until I hit junior high.

TS: What kind of science were you interested in after you found out about science.

CS: Quantum physics—

TS: Oh.

CS: —and biology and—

TS: All sorts.

CS: All of it. I love all of it. But back when I was young girls didn't do science and math and stuff like that. And I actually learned—I didn't—I was very sick in second grade and missed weeks and weeks and weeks of school, and so I missed some of the basics of math, and I never caught up, and I have math anxiety to this day.

TS: Right, because of that time.

CS: Because of that. I don't know—I mean, I eventually learned the basic math skills, but I still get anxious even just trying to do math because I feel like I—I don't grasp as readily as other people do.

TS: I think that's probably pretty common—

CS: Yeah.

TS: That's more the norm, I think.

CS: When I was growing up, you had your choice to be a teacher, a nurse, a librarian. Let's see, what other choices did you have? All—You could—A secretary, and you could do all—any of those things until you got married and then you had to stay home and be a mommy. And I knew from the time I was a little—a tiny tot that that wasn't—

TS: Really? You didn't think you were confined to that, but those are the roles that you were supposed to play?

CS: Those were the roles I was supposed to play by.

TS: So what did you want? What did you think you were going to do?

CS: I don't remember wanting to be a cowboy or an astronaut or anything like that, I just wanted to do something really important. I remember watching a Miss America [beauty] pageant, and all the girls saying they wanted world peace, and I thought "I want world peace too." So when I was real little, I was already thinking in terms of doing something big—on a big scale—to make the world a better place. That was really important to me. I

didn't know how I was going to do that, didn't have a clue, but—and it didn't come to me until I was—

TS: Later.

CS: Much later. But that was my wish.

TS: But the seed was planted.

CS: The seed was definitely planted.

TS: At a Miss America contest.

CS: Yeah.

TS: That's a—

CS: Yeah.

TS: That's an interesting connection to that. Now, how about high school. How was high school for you?

CS: High school was a—junior high and high school were in Mena, Arkansas, and it was not a fun place to be because, like I said, I'd been raised with so much diversity, and so much fun and opportunity, and in Arkansas they didn't have any African Americans. They had no diversity whatsoever. The—One of the towns bragging points was that the last black family that tried to move into town in the forties, they hung the father from the courthouse tree.

TS: That was their bragging—

CS: That was their point of pride.

TS: Pride.

CS: Yeah. And that was just appalling to me. So there was rampant racism and sexism. There were just—There were no opportunities in this little town.

TS: Now, had your dad been from Arkansas? Was he moving back or—

CS: No, he—my aunt and uncle got stationed—got transferred there with U.S Motors, and my dad had—one of his second or third jobs he'd always done was landscaping, and the nursery there in Mena, Arkansas was being sold about the time he was getting out, so my aunt told him come move down here and we'll run the nursery together, which didn't last for long—them running it together—but he ended up having the nursery for, like, twenty-five years.

TS: Oh, so he kept it.

CS: Yeah.

TS: So it was just an opportunity for a job and work.

CS: Opportunity for a job, and doing something that he loved, and making it a family business.

TS: Okay. Now you're in high school, and it's a totally different environment than from what your formative years were.

CS: Yeah.

TS: Now, did you participate in any sports or extracurricular activities?

CS: Well, like I said, gymnastics was the only sport they had for girls there.

TS: Oh, even though high school?

CS: Even—They cancelled it when I was—I guess I was in ninth grade when they canceled the gymnastics program, and there were no other sports for girls, so I decided since they canceled the gymnastics program that I was going to join the football team.

TS: Really? What year was this?

CS: This was in tenth or eleventh grade—

TS: So like 1977, something like that.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

CS: —and I kept saying, "I'm going to join the football team." Seventy-six, '77. "I'm going to join the football team, I'm going to join the football team."

And so, I kept saying it, and they kept saying, "No, no, no." And one day the coach called me, and he said "Okay, you're on the team."

I was like "Yes! A victory for women everywhere."

And he said "Here's the way it's going to go down." He said "During the practices we will use your body as a tackling dummy, and during the games your butt will never get off the bench. Think about it." [chuckles]

And I just thought about it for a second before I said, "Fine," and obviously did not make it on the football team.

TS: Right, he just wanted to find a way to—

CS: Yeah.

TS: —get you to say no.

CS: My other way to get—to sock it to the man was in Mrs.—Mrs.—I can't remember her name—the business teacher. I was in a class full of women who were taking dictation, and book keeping, and all those other things, and she went through the class—this is my junior year—and she said "Well, girls, what are you going to be when you grow up? When you graduate?"

And they went "I'm going to be a teacher. I'm going to be a nurse. I'm going to be a teacher. I'm going to be a nurse. I'm going to me a librarian. I'm going to be a mom;" going, going—all the typical things.

And she got to me and I said "I'm going to be president of the United States." And she kicked me out of class for being impudent. [chuckles] So I spent the rest of the year running for president of the United States. I had posters all over the lockers, and—Amazingly, I didn't make it. [chuckles]

TS: It's not too late. You can still be president.

CS: I'm still proud of the fact that I'd been impudent.

TS: Well, now, where did this fiery, feistiness come from, do you think?

CS: My dad.

TS: Yeah.

CS: My mom was—My dad was always encouraging me to do things, and think bigger, and do bigger. And my mother was always saying, "You can't do that; it's not allowed; you won't succeed." She was always kind of tamping at me and my father down. And so, the harder she tamped me down—

TS: Talking you down, right?

CS: Talking me down. The more she talked us down, the more I did. I loved it. I just—

TS: So your dad's encouraging you.

CS: My dad encouraging this whole time, yeah. And he became an entrepreneur, and he was—he was successful. For twenty-five years he fed his family on that business. My mother was always telling him he wasn't going to succeed, and always telling me I wasn't going to succeed. And that—the two influences were very important to me. I really appreciate the fact that she did that because I loved to be told that I couldn't do something. Because sure as shooting it's going to get done. And I loved being told I can

do something, like my dad did, because that was the—kind of the wind beneath my wings, if you will.

TS: Yes.

CS: So between the two forces, I was—

TS: You had motivation from your mom to push away from that, and your dad to pull you towards things.

CS: Yes. Exactly.

TS: Yeah, it's great that you had that recognition of how they were both helpful.

CS: Yes.

TS: Yeah.

CS: I really do appre—For years I resented my mom for that, but now I appreciate the fact that she was a tremendous teacher that enabled me to achieve the things I'm achieving.

TS: So did you graduate from high school in 1979?

CS: Nineteen seventy-nine.

TS: Okay.

CS: Nineteen seventy-nine.

TS: What did you do after that?

CS: I had worked on and off. I was a—my first job was a—I was twelve—as a babysitter and housekeeper. I was so hyperactive that when I would go to people's houses to babysit I would clean their house so they would pay me more. So I made two or three times as much as the average babysitter. And then I worked for my parents off and on. When I was fifteen I got my first official job as a roller skating car hop at Sonic [Drive-In]. And then I worked food services, Pizza Hut, and various restaurants over the years, which I wouldn't recommend to anybody; doing food service work. But it taught me a lot.

TS: Why not? Why would you not recommend it?

CS: It's really, really hard work, and it's really—it doesn't pay well; really doesn't pay well. But it got me through school which was great. And after high school I went and joined the Young Adult Conservation Corps—the YACC—which was a division of the U.S Forest Service, and I became a—I built trails, and planted hundreds of thousands of trees, and became a fire fighter; got trained as a fire fighter. And then I ended up being the life

guard—I'd been a life guard in high school—I ended up being the life guard for the Forest Service Camp that we were at. And I loved that work.

TS: Were you often the only women doing some of these things?

CS: There were—There were usually about eight or ten of us.

TS: Okay.

CS: Among a hundred guys.

TS: Well, because even, like, firefighting, I mean, that's still a very—

CS: Yes.

TS: —narrow—small—

CS: I was the only woman that got trained in that cohort.

TS: In the cohort—

CS: In the firefighting.

TS: —that you were in for that.

CS: Yeah.

TS: But the other trail laying and stuff, there were women involved?

CS: Yeah, there were some. But talk about getting attention. Boy. [chuckles]

TS: In what way?

CS: I mean—just—I had as many dates as I could possibly handle because there were so few women there and so many guys. So I had all of the attention I could handle there. When I was nineteen, I was still working for the Forest Service. I decided to go back—I had started college in high school, and I decided to go back to college at Fort Smith Community College in Fort Smith, Arkansas. And while I was there, I was raped by a sheriff's deputy that I was—on our second date. And went into a deep depression for a number of months, and my father finally said to me, he said, "You've got to pull yourself out of this."

TS: Did he—

CS: He didn't know what had happened.

TS: Okay, he just knew something—

CS: I just—I moved back home and I was just catatonic with depression. And he said, "You've got to pull yourself out of this. I want you to go see the marine recruiter and talk to him." And my twin brother had been a marine—was a marine at that time. My little brother later went in. Two brothers-in-law were in. And—

TS: Were any of your sisters in?

CS: No, no other sisters. And I thought, "What the heck? I'll go see these guys."
So I went and met with the recruiters, and I aced the ASVAB [Armed Service Vocational Aptitude Battery], and they said I could go into whatever field I wanted, so I went for six years with guaranteed photo journalism, which I wasn't really entirely sure what that meant; I just knew that I wasn't going to be a cook for six years.

TS: Right. Now, did you look at any other service? Just the Marines Corps?

CS: Just the—Oh, heavens no. I—God—[chuckling]

TS: Just asking. Just thought I'd—

CS: I would have been disowned. No, the only other service—

TS: Some people rebel.

CS: The only other service I would have gone in would have been the air force.

TS: Yeah, why?

CS: I don't know. I just—I don't—I—I've always felt like the army didn't respect its people as much as the Marine Corps does. And the air force, they just seemed very cool to me. Air force people just seemed very—

TS: Well, you have that right, of course. [Note: TS is an Air Force Veteran]

CS: Yes. [both chuckling]

TS: I think the answer I get most often for, "Why did you go into the Marine Corps—" Can you guess what the answer is that I usually get?

CS: Why did you go in the air force?

TS: No, why'd you go in the Marine Corps? The answer I usually get—often get—is because they're the best.

CS: That's—That's right.

TS: So there you go.

CS: That's right, they are. They're known to be the best.

TS: But you're following in your dad, and your brothers, and—

CS: Yeah, and I had to show them how it was done. So I talked to the recruiter. I got involved in the poolee program, which is a late entry program.

TS: Poolee?

CS: Poolee. P—I was a poolee, and a poolee is someone who is in the delayed entry program; P-O-O-L-E-E. I wasn't going to be—I got involved with them in February or March, and I wasn't going to go to boot camp until April. So during that time they were teaching me how to field strip an M16 [rifle]. My father taught me how to march, I knew my general orders; I knew everything before I left.

TS: Getting prepared.

CS: Oh my God, I was so prepared. During that period—

TS: You mind if I pause it for just a second?

CS: No, go ahead. Go right ahead

[Recording Paused]

TS: Okay, I'm sorry about that.

CS: No problem.

TS: So you get to boot camp. Is that—

CS: No, I wasn't at boot camp yet.

TS: Not yet. Oh you're getting—

CS: Before.

TS: —prepared—

CS: Getting ready—

TS: Right.

CS: Getting prepared to go to boot camp. And my recruiter raped me. And the reason it happened—First of all, it was extremely common for the recruiters to hit on the women recruits. I mean, it happened every day to every woman who came in. And I was already so traumatized from what had happened before—

TS: Fairly recently.

CS: Yeah, so that when he pushed himself on me I did not know how to get myself out of that situation.

TS: Okay.

CS: And—Anyway, that will come into play later.

TS: Okay.

CS: So I go to boot camp on my birthday—my twenty-first—my twentieth birthday—and on the airplane from Little Rock, Arkansas to [Marine Corps Recruit Depot] Parris Island [South Carolina], I got drunk celebrating my birthday and the fact that I was going to boot camp. And I was getting all my drinks free because I was going to the military, and I—it was my birthday. They let me go in the cockpit of the plane while it was flying and—

TS: Really?!

CS: [chuckles] Yes.

TS: Is this a happy drunk?

CS: I'm very happy drunk.

TS: Okay.

CS: So anyway, I didn't know that when I got to Parris—to Beaufort—do they call it Beaufort? Beaufort? Beaufort, South Carolina. At the airport, they make you sit at attention for hours on end until everyone arrives from every location around the country.

TS: You're sitting though.

CS: You're sitting at attention.

TS: Okay.

CS: And I had—I was so drunk, and I was leaning back and forth, and they kept screaming at me to stop leaning back and forth and not to fall asleep, and I was so tired. And they want you to be tired though. So they stick you on a bus. About midnight or one o'clock in the morning, they put us on a bus and they drove us to Parris Island, and I'll never forget the smell; never forget the smell of Parris Island. It—It's a swamp, and the smell is very swampy, very intense. They take away all your things—and they're screaming at you the whole time—they take away all your things, and they run you through the ringer for two days. They don't let you sleep. They want you sleep deprived so that you're almost stupid on your feet so that they can completely obliterate who—your experience; who you thought you were when you went in.

And the funny thing is, my dad had raised me on stories about when he was in boot camp in the fifties, and how his drill instructors beat him every single day. He got a tooth knocked out. He was hung by his pants for calling them—or trousers—for calling them pants. He—I mean, he just went through utter hell, getting beaten just practically every day. That was just the way it was back in the fifties.

So anyway, after about a week in boot camp, I'm laying there in bed, and all the girls are crying themselves—crying going, "I want to go home."

And I already knew how to field strip an M16, and my marching orders, and my general orders, and all this other stuff, and I—I thought, "This is it? All they're going to do is yell at me?" I was—I went there expecting to be beaten. [both chuckle] Which is a terrible thing if you think about it, really.

TS: Yes.

CS: But I expected to be hit, and all they could do was yell at us. They couldn't even swear at us really. And so, all these girls were just sobbing in their beds, and I was just like, "Wow, this is all there is going to be." So boot camp was—I had fun in boot camp. I was always one step ahead because I knew everything before I went, and I really hit my stride. I loved the discipline. I loved the physical challenge of it. Although, I was in worse physical shape when I got out of boot camp than when I went in, because I had been a firefighter before I went in, and they gave us a week combat training—we were the first platoon to have any combat training, for the women—

TS: For women?

CS: They didn't give us an extra week to do it in so they took it out of the PT [physical training].

TS: Okay.

CS: So we didn't have as much PT. We had very little physical training during boot camp so—

TS: This is '81?

CS: This is '81.

TS: Eighty-one, okay.

CS: Eighty-one, yeah. And so, we got to go in the rifle range. We got to go through the gas chamber. We didn't—It was pitiful compared to what women go through today in boot camp, but it was a big change for them to let women go on the range, and I was an expert rifleman so I did really well at that and loved it.

TS: Had you shot before?

CS: Never had. Well, I tried a shotgun once and it knocked me on my butt, but I had never shot an M16 or anything like that. The hard part was that the—my arms were so short that getting the stock into my shoulder was really difficult, because it was just like a quarter inch too long to really—I had to almost beat it in there to make it fit my shoulder. But—

TS: It wouldn't hold because of the length of the butt?

CS: Yeah.

TS: Yeah.

CS: Yeah. I remember when I went through the gas chamber, they make you take off your gas mask and recite the alphabet forward and backwards, and do jumping jacks, and do all—sing a song, and do all these other things. And I come out of the gas chamber—And everything runs when you go to the gas chamber. I don't know if you ever went through the gas chamber—not that—Everything runs; your eyes run, your nose runs, your mouth runs; you're just a big mess of saliva and snot when you come out of this thing.

And so, I come out of the gas chamber. I can't see anything. My face is just weeping with saliva and stuff, and I hear, "Cindy?" And I manage to wipe off one eye and look up, and my very first boyfriend from Mena, Arkansas was working at the gas chamber. And he recognized me, which just blows my mind, how he could possibly recognize me, but he did. And I'm like that's—that was the way I wanted to be seen, was coming out of the gas chamber, to one of my first boyfriends.

TS: [chuckles] That's a small world.

CS: Trying to—

TS: So you are kind of emboldened by this experience, a little bit.

CS: Oh, yes.

TS: Are you noticing that the other women around you are struggling? Some of them, I'm sure.

CS: Yes.

TS: Now, did any of them come to you and ask you for help, or—

CS: Oh, yeah.

TS: Yeah.

CS: Yeah.

TS: Because they noticed that you had it kind of together, it sounds like.

CS: Yeah. Yeah. And I took them—I was given several leadership positions in the platoon. I ended up being the honor graduate, and the way my contract worked was that if I was—I had signed up for six years, so if I was honor graduate I would also get a meritorious promotion to lance corporal, E3. So I graduated as a lance corporal which, like, never happens. My drill instructors at first were like, "Well, we can't do that; there's no such thing."

And I was like, "[Here's your?] contract."

TS: Right.

CS: They had to look it up. But I—I ended up being the honor graduate. We didn't tell my dad. I paid for my parents to come from Mena to my graduation ceremony, and the night before one of the women in my platoon blew it. She mentioned it to my dad; "Oh, you must be so proud of her for being the honor graduate."

And he just cried like a baby. And according to my mother they went to the Staff NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer] Club that night, and he stood on the table going, "My baby's the honor graduate." And the next day at the graduation ceremony, he's crying on the general's shoulder and—

It was funny. At Parris Island they had these huge black flies that bite, and when they bite it's like taking a chunk out of you. And I'm standing at attention in front of the general—in front of the commandant—the guy who later became the commandant—and one of the black flies landed on my left leg, and it was biting me so hard I could feel the blood trickling down my leg, and I started going, "[sound of person in pain]," making this noise trying to contain the pain.

And the general's looking around like, "What the hell is that noise?"

And then the fly went onto the other leg, and I could feel the blood running down that leg, and when I was done I had these two rivulets of blood on the backs of my legs from the stupid fly that I had to stand at attention for and not flinch or do anything. It was—Forget the sand fleas, it was the flies that were the hardest.

TS: That was dedication.

CS: Yeah. So—Oh, I forgot to mention, before I went to boot camp, I was hooked up with a—one of the Iranian hostages, Steve Kirtley, who was one of the Marine—

[The Iranian Hostage Crisis was a diplomatic standoff between Iran and the United States, where a group of Iranian students belonging to the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line took over the U.S. embassy in Tehran. Fifty-two American diplomats and citizens were held hostage for 444 days, from 4 November 1979 to 20 January 1980]

TS: What do you mean by hooked up with?

CS: Put on a date with.

TS: Before you went?

CS: Yeah, before I went into boot camp.

TS: Okay.

CS: Just before I went to boot camp I went on my first date with Steve Kirtley, who'd been one of the embassy Marines—embassy guards.

TS: Okay.

CS: He was so sweet. He was just a real sweetheart. And so, he and I started dating, and when I got out of boot camp I went back and spent some time with Steve before I went to my training at Defense Information School. The Defense Information School—DINFOS—was in Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana, and it was a party school. I mean, if you went there married, you left divorced. If you went there single, you left married. I mean, it was crazy school—

TS: So which one do you fall into there?

CS: I went single, didn't end up married, but ended up having a lot of boyfriends while I was there. [both chuckle]

TS: Could have been married.

CS: I did a lot of partying. Oh my God.

TS: Yeah.

CS: I did so much partying. But first I just went for journalism school, and after I got out I went to Camp Pendleton [California] as a beat reporter for MAG-39—the Marine Air Group 39—and—at Pendleton. And so, I basically covered the air wing, and they would put me in helicopters and try to get—try to scare me with their flying. And they—I never

would give in. I never would let them know that they were terrifying me when they were flying.

I remember one time the parade field next—our building was in the General's Building, and so the parade field was right next to us. And that's where the helicopters would land, too, when they had to drop off a VIP. I was getting ready to go cover a story, and someone—a Huey helicopter landed on the field—it had been raining so the field was mushy—and I was in a skirt. I thought, "How am I going to get in this helicopter?" Well, I reached my arms up and they pulled me up, but when they pulled me up one of my shoes was stuck in the mud, and I'm screaming, "My shoe! My shoe!" And the helicopter started taking off, and I'm screaming, "My shoe!" They took off. I had to do the whole photoshoot with one shoe.

TS: [chuckles]

CS: But when we were done, they dropped me off in the same spot. I looked down and there was my shoe. I stuck my foot in my shoe and I just kept on going. [both chuckling]

TS: That's a pretty classy way to get off the helicopter.

CS: Yeah, it was embarrassing having to do that shoot in one shoe.

TS: Well, I wanted to ask you, too, how did your mom feel about you going into the Marine Corps?

CS: Oh, she was thrilled.

TS: Was she?

CS: I remember my college roommate's mother said to her, "You must be just absolutely devastated by Cindy going into the Marine Corps."

And she said, "Why would I be devastated?"

She said, "Well, she's going to be around all those men, and good girls don't go in the Marine Corps." And my mother was just very affro—she was very taken aback by that, and let her know in no uncertain terms that she was very proud of me for that so—

TS: Yeah, so that was something she was supportive—

CS: Oh, very much so.

TS: I mean, not that she wasn't other times, just—

CS: And they saw that I was thriving.

TS: Yeah.

CS: So they were really happy for me. The sexual harassment in the Marine Corps was just daily. I mean it like *M*A*S*H*. [popular television show from the 1970s, set during the Korean War]

TS: Well, describe a day, like, going through it for someone who's not—

CS: I was this little hottie back then, and—but you'd go to work, and you'd try to be a professional, but it's very difficult when they're constantly making—your co-workers are constantly making comments about your chest or you butt or your legs or—

TS: Somehow your physical appearance.

CS: Things about your physical appearance all the time, and getting backed into a file cabinet, having someone come up and plant a kiss on the back of your neck. I had my staff—senior Staff NCO plant a kiss on the back of my neck while I was working one day.

TS: Now, after having experienced two episodes of rape, how were you responding to this type of behavior?

CS: Part of it—I mean, it was happening to most of the women I worked with—not all of the women, most of them—and we sort of laughed it off as "boys will be boys" behavior. But inside it felt terrible because I felt like I wasn't being taken seriously, and I wasn't being taken seriously as a professional.

TS: No?

CS: Women Marines were just—we were lucky to be there. We were there to support the men and we didn't really have any function. We were taking jobs away from the men who should have them. And I used to think—watch *M*A*S*H*, and I think that *M*A*S*H* was a very funny show, but now I can't watch it. I can't watch the reruns because those poor nurses were being harassed, and fondled, and talked about every second of the day, and you just can't operate in an environment like that.

And so, I found it very difficult to maneuver with that, but I made do. I was a 4.0, 4.0 Marine, so my proficiency and conduct marks were perfect. And I was getting—I got a meritorious promotion to sergeant—or to corporal—within eight months, so when I went to boot camp I was an E-4, and then a year later I was a sergeant. So I was doing really well, but it was like water on rocks; it was starting to take its toll. And I married a guy that I worked with—another sergeant—Grafton.

TS: Where did you marry him at?

CS: Pendleton.

TS: Okay.

CS: We got married in Mena [Arkansas], but we were stationed at Pendleton. So there were two Sergeant Graftons, so that's when I got the name CJ, because they started calling me by my initials like they do in the military. And he—

TS: So that stuck apparently?

CS: Yeah. He saw the harassment, and I hid a lot of it from him because he just would have kicked somebody's butt if I hadn't.

TS: While you were married you got a lot of harassment too?

CS: Yeah, because—

TS: Even within the unit you were assigned to?

CS: The Staff NCO didn't like my husband. And my husband kind of had this way of meeting people and thinking—deciding they were a jerk, and so the people would act jerky toward him, and then that would validate for him that they were a jerk. And so, he—a lot of our senior officers didn't care for him very much. Although he wasn't a bad guy. But our Staff NCO couldn't stand him—senior Staff NCO—so he used to do things—he would sidle up to me, and put his arm around me in front of my husband, and say, "When are you going to be with a real man, honey?" Things like that, just to tick off my husband. And my husband would have to swallow it because what was he going to do? Was he going to go beat his butt? He would have been kicked out the Marine Corps if that had happened. Just little things like that.

TS: Because of the rank issue too?

CS: The rank issue, yeah.

TS: So, it was power in all sorts of different directions there, right?

CS: Yeah.

TS: Towards your husband. Towards you.

CS: Yes.

TS: And the display of that.

CS: Yeah, and it was—I wanted to be taken seriously. I wanted to be—I wanted to do my job the best I could, and I did a really good job at what I was—in the field that I was in. And the harassment just made it more difficult to maintain that professionalism, because I felt like I was constantly being reminded that I was just a pair of legs.

TS: Did you ever get away from it? I mean, on the job?

CS: No.

TS: No? Even when you went on an assignment or anything?

CS: No.

TS: It didn't matter?

CS: No.

TS: On the helicopter, on the—

CS: Didn't matter. I was this pretty little thing and—

TS: What were you doing for your coping skills for that at that time? Anything?

CS: Dissociating a lot—dissociating a lot.

TS: Yeah?

CS: Yeah.

TS: And what does that mean?

CS: Just numbing out, and letting it just slip right past me. I would laugh it away. Inside I would think, "You're such a jerk," or I would think, "Maybe there's something I'm doing wrong to be getting all this attention."

TS: Did you think about, like, at that time in the services, where sexual harassment training—anti-sexual harassment—

CS: Oh, there was no such thing.

TS: Yeah? Nothing.

CS: No such thing.

TS: Nothing came along for a while?

CS: No. No, no such thing.

TS: You just had to deal with it on your own?

CS: Yeah.

TS: Did you ever report it to anyone?

CS: No. I mean, that wasn't something we even thought about.

TS: We didn't even have a word for it, right?

CS: No.

TS: At that time.

CS: We didn't. There was no such word as date rape back then, and there was—the sexual harassment was just part of the job.

TS: Right. Well, what did you like about your job? Did you like it?

CS: I loved my job. I got to stand on the skids of a helicopter, and fire a machine gun, and fire a light armored tank weapon, and ride in tank, and ride in a Gama Goat [an amphibious vehicle]. I did something different every single day. I got to interview movie stars, and generals, and grunts, and—it was just the most fun job I think you can have in the military.

TS: Did you get to pick what you could do?

CS: Yeah, I got to pick a lot of the stories.

TS: Did you?

CS: I was assigned stories every once in a while, but for the most part you go out and you find the kinds of stories that you want to do.

TS: Yeah.

CS: My very first day on the job, fresh out of boot camp, and fresh out of journalism training, and I go to the office in my cammies [camouflage uniform], and there's no one there. And there's no one there because there's a joint army—joint [U.S.] Navy/Marine Corps exercise going on at the beach, and they said, "Well, you're going to escort a film crew." And so, the driver drives me to the beach. I meet the film crew. There's this whole battle going on on the beach, and—

TS: This is at Camp Pendleton?

CS: At Camp Pendleton on the beach.

TS: Okay

CS: And the film crew decides it wants to get a shot of the machine gunners, so it starts to walk out there in front of the machine gunners, and I'm like, "Are you crazy!" And I jump in front of them, and go, "Cease fire! Cease fire! Cease fire!"

And you hear down the line, "Cease fire! Cease fire! Cease fire!"

The machine gunner stopped shooting, the riflemen stop shooting, the helicopters land, the ships stop sailing, the tanks stop rolling." I'm like, "There, get your shot."

So the cameraman looks at me kind of askance, and he takes the shot, and then over the hill comes the general, "Who the hell stopped my exercise?!"

TS: Oh, no.

CS: And everybody pointed to me.

TS: Oh, no.

CS: They were firing blanks.

TS: Yeah.

CS: But I didn't know that.

TS: Right. Right.

CS: And that was the first impression that most of my co-workers had of me. And that's when I got the nickname Corporal Gullible.

TS: So that didn't help with being a woman either, right, and not—

CS: [laughing] It was so funny. It was so funny. Oh my God. And then there was the time the inspector general came, and we're standing in formation, and I'm on the front—I'm on the front line of the formation, and I'm flanked by two guys who are well over six feet [tall], and the inspector general walks toward me, and then past me, and then he stops. And he goes backwards, and he stands in front of me, he says, "Are you tall enough to be a Marine?"

And I said, "Sir, I am five foot two [inches], a hundred and twenty-five pounds of twisted steel and sex appeal." [both chuckle] Just like my drill instructor taught me.

And everybody froze, I could see my boss, the look on his face was like, "Oh my God, we're all going to die now." And then the general started laughing. And he laughed so hard he almost cried. Of course everybody is laughing with him. I got in so much trouble later—so much trouble later—but at the moment it was so—

TS: How else were you going to answer that?

CS: How else was I supposed to answer a question like that?

TS: That's right. [both laughing] So you stayed feisty.

CS: I stayed feisty.

TS: Yeah.

CS: And then I got—my husband and I got stationed in Albany, Georgia. And—

TS: Well, tell me a little bit about your quarters where you were at when—

CS: Oh, first I was in the base—base housing; when I was single I was in base housing; the barracks. And they weren't bad. There were two people to a room.

TS: Okay.

CS: So it wasn't bad. It was really close to where I worked. I already had a car though so—

TS: Like a shared shower and bathroom—

CS: Shared shower and bathroom.

TS: —down the hall or something.

CS: No, it was right there in the room.

TS: Oh, it was like a little suite, sort of?

CS: Yeah, a little suite.

TS: Oh, okay.

CS: Yeah, so it wasn't bad at all.

TS: So that would have been, like, '81?

CS: It was new—It was new housing, yeah. It was new housing so—

TS: That's pretty nice.

CS: —it was pretty nice. And when I got married we decided to live off base, so we had an apartment, and then we moved into this little tiny one-bedroom place that was about the size of—oh, it was probably, all told—I don't know—four hundred square feet, the whole place.

TS: Was there a garage or something?

CS: It was—It had a garage attached to it, but the garage was as big as the house was. [chuckles] It was so tiny. And it was there that I had my first son.

TS: Okay, what year did you have your son?

CS: Nineteen eighty-four.

TS: Eighty-four?

CS: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

CS: And I ended up getting a lot of time off—off work. You're supposed to get six weeks off after you have a baby—or eight weeks off, I guess, after you have a baby—and they misjudged the due date, so instead of being born in February he was born at the end of March. So I got off on the first week of January—I got off—and then didn't go back to work until almost the end of May. So I had, like, five months off work.

TS: What'd you do during that time?

CS: I watched a lot of *Mission Impossible.*

TS: Just stayed at home.

CS: It was, like, the only thing that was on TV.

TS: Oh, okay.

CS: And I took care of the baby.

TS: How were you treated as a pregnant woman in the Marine Corps?

CS: My boss who was—I had a female colonel, she was called the dragon lady, and she—she loved my husband, did not like me. Oh, she didn't like me, because she liked my husband so much and just felt I wasn't good enough for him, I guess. And she was not happy with me for getting pregnant. She was like, "Another woman Marine—" this was in a time where you could choose, finally, whether to stay in or leave. A couple years prior to that you didn't have a choice; if you got pregnant you were out. And so, she was very disappointed in me that I had proven once again that I was a girl; that I couldn't compete with the guys because I had this—had to go and get pregnant.

TS: How did your coworkers treat you?

CS: Oh, they were great.

TS: Yeah?

CS: The only problem was, my husband, who was also a photojournalist, took pictures of me giving birth to my son which—he took some beautiful photographs, but after we left the hospital with the baby we went to my office, and I showed all the girls the pictures, and then it was time for us to leave and I'm like, "Where are the photographs?" Well, I turned around and there are all the guys I work with looking at the photos of me spread to kingdom come going, "Oh my God!" [laughs] I don't think they ever looked at me the same again.

TS: Didn't exactly want to share that with them, I'm sure. So you're in this office, the photojournalism office that you were in?

CS: Yes.

TS: You had a female—

CS: We had a female colonel.

TS: —colonel.

CS: Colonel Steinem[?]. And—

TS: That's seems like colonel at that time would have been pretty high ranking—

CS: Yeah.

TS: —for the Marine Corps.

CS: Yeah, she was very—she was a very angry, bitter woman, but when I think about what she must have gone through to get where she was, and they called her Legs Lawson[?]. She was—I think about the harassment I went through, it had to be ten times worse—

TS: As a colonel they called her that?

CS: Yeah, not in front of her face obviously.

TS: Right.

CS: But I think about what she must have gone through; it must have been really challenging.

TS: So she was in charge. Do you remember how things broke down?

CS: We had a—a master gunnery sergeant, our senior non-commissioned officer, and a couple gunnery sergeants, a couple captains. We had different divisions in public affairs.

We had COMREL which was community relations, the newspaper staff, and then the writing staff.

TS: Was there a mix of men and women or was it—

CS: Oh yeah, men and women.

TS: But mostly men, because there still weren't that many—

CS: It may have been 50/50 because—

TS: —women in the Marine Corps at that time.

CS: Yeah, it may have been 50/50 in that office, which was very unusual because we had broadcasters and we had the journalists, and a lot of women went into that field as well as the guys.

TS: It was a huge base, too, so you—

CS: Oh, it was a gigantic base.

TS: —you probably had a lot of staff to cover it all, I would think.

CS: Yeah. Yeah, we did. And this was in the days of black and white photography where you shot the film, and then you processed the film, and you burned and dodged the photographs—

[Burning and dodging film refers to techniques used to develop film. Dodging increases the areas of the print that the photographer wants to be lighter while burning increases the areas of the print that the photographer wants to be darker.]

TS: So you learned all of this.

CS: Oh—I miss those days.

TS: Yeah.

CS: I don't—I don't even know how to operate a digital camera.

TS: [chuckles]

CS: I'm so ashamed to say that.

TS: I'm sure you would be fine with it, CJ. I'm sure you would be fine.

CS: But it's not as much fun as—I mean, I had a torrid love affair in the dark room once.

TS: Oh, no. Okay.

CS: It was awesome.

TS: That was on base?

CS: No, that was—that was when I went back to photojournalism school.

TS: Oh, okay.

CS: Later.

TS: There was a couple things I didn't catch when you first were talking about your basic training. Was that one of the first times you were away from home or had you been away from home before that?

CS: I'd spent the summer in California when I was seventeen, and lived in the Forest Service Camp, and lived up at Fort Smith when I was going to college for a while.

TS: Oh, okay, so that was a little ways away from home.

CS: Yeah, so I had no homesickness or anything like that. I did fine.

TS: Okay. When you got your off base housing did you get any BAQ [Basic Allowance for Quarters] or anything?

CS: Yes.

TS: Yeah, you did?

CS: Yeah.

TS: You were qualified for that?

CS: Yes.

TS: Was there anything up to this point that was really hard physically for you to do in the Marine Corps?

CS: I never learned how to run.

TS: No?

CS: I never learned how to breathe when I ran, and my stride is so short, I'm five foot two on a good day. And so, they would put me at the front of the platoon because they always put the shortest person with the shortest stride in the front. So the guys, who are running five miles behind—we were running five miles—would end up jogging in place for five miles basically, while I was taking these little mincing steps.

TS: Right, because you can't have a large stride because you're just not—physically possible.

CS: No, but I always got first class on PFT's [Physical Fitness Test], and—

TS: Finished in the period, and time that you were supposed to.

CS: Yeah.

TS: Yeah.

CS: Yeah, I always did really well on those.

TS: So the running was just the biggest challenge.

CS: Oh, I hated running. I swore I'd never run after I got out, although I did for a period of time after that, but I hated the running.

TS: Did you have to go into formation and run every morning, or did you have—

CS: No, we really didn't have that much PT either.

TS: No?

CS: The army does a lot more PT than the Marine Corps did at that time when I was in.

TS: Yeah.

CS: We would have—This is where I learned to hate the Dallas Cowboys [football team].

TS: Okay.

CS: Our senior Staff NCO—

TS: Surprised it took you so long.

CS: —was a Dallas Cowboy—[both chuckle]—was a Dallas Cowboys fan. He was from Dallas and he dated a Dallas Cowboy cheerleader, so if Dallas lost on Sunday we ran five miles on Monday.

TS: Oh, well that would be a very good reason.

CS: And through behavior modification, I learned to loathe the Dallas Cowboys.

TS: That's interesting. So you had your son in '84, and then you go back to work.

CS: Yes.

TS: How was that?

CS: It was good. He was in day care on the base.

TS: Yes.

CS: And his dad helped. We drove together to work and—

TS: Okay.

CS: —dropped the baby off on the way.

TS: Oh, because you're at the same place.

CS: Same office.

TS: Same kind of schedule.

CS: Yeah. And he—he had to go to Somalia, and deployed a couple different places, but because I knew what he was doing every day that helped.

TS: He deployed as a photojournalist to cover the events that were going on?

CS: Yeah, whenever something was happening in Somalia, and a couple times he was put on a truck, and said, "We can't tell you where you're going but you're going somewhere," and then it would get called off. So he didn't know—it was like little uprisings were happening that and he was on call.

TS: Oh, I see. But that wasn't something you could have participated in.

CS: No.

TS: Just him because of the gender issue.

CS: That's right. Yeah.

TS: Women couldn't go into the operations.

CS: No, not at all.

TS: Deployment.

CS: Not even close.

TS: Yeah. Did you think that that was unusual or that was the way it was or—

CS: I thought that was the way it was, although I was disappointed because I wanted to go out and fight for my country.

TS: Yeah, did you think you would have been able to handle it okay if you had been [unclear]?

CS: Then I thought I would.

TS: Yeah.

CS: I don't now.

TS: No?

CS: I think now that killing somebody is going to have an impact on you no matter what—what you do it for. It's going to have an impact on you. And I see these people coming home with PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder], and I understand completely why that happens.

TS: Yeah.

CS: I'm glad now that I was not in a position to do that because I would have taken it very—I would have taken it very hard.

TS: So now, after the time that you've been in, are you thinking about how long you want to stay in or are you just taking it for the ride or what—

CS: I don't think I ever thought about staying in for thirty or twenty [years]. I think I was just—I'm going to stay my six and let it go. It didn't end up happening that way though. After Pendleton we got stationed in Albany, Georgia.

TS: Okay.

CS: And the boss we had there, who happens to be the first cousin of my very best friend that I served with at Camp Pendleton, was a misogynist. I didn't suffer sexual harassment there, I suffered misogyny there. He hated women in his corps.

TS: So explain the difference to whoever is reading or listening.

CS: The sexual harassment was rude comments, and inappropriate touches of my body, and comments about me, and sexual overtures, and things like that. The misogyny was that he hated women. He didn't believe women belonged in his Marine Corps. He didn't think women were good for anything. He actually was arrested, while we were stationed there, for beating his wife. And he treated me so badly.

TS: What would he do?

CS: He called—Well, he didn't like my husband.

TS: Did or did not?

CS: Did not like my husband. And so, he would play us against each other. He'd give us duty back to back, and—knowing that we had—we were hardly going to see each other, the way he scheduled the duties. He called me his crazy Marine.

TS: Why did he think that?

CS: Because I ended up going into a depression while I was there because he was on me constantly. I mean, like an example is that one day I started my period, and I lived ten minutes away so I ran home and changed my skirt and came back. I was gone twenty minutes, maybe. And he called me into his office and he made me stand up at attention, and told me that women knew when that thing was going to happen, and if it ever happened again he was going to write me up and take a strike[?]. Just little—Rain on rocks. Just little things that he would do to make sure that I knew that—And my conduct and proficiency marks, he marked me so low. And I'd been 4.0, 4.0, all these years, and kicked butt, and I could do nothing right for him. And I went—I got very depressed, and when I got—when I started seeing a psychiatrist in the military that's when he started calling me his crazy Marine. And he would introduce me to people as his—he would say, "This is Sergeant So-and-so, and this is my crazy Marine, Sergeant Grafton." And it was horrible.

TS: Did you try to report it to anyone?

CS: No, who was I going to report that to? What really was there to report? I mean, there wasn't—he was—he was kind of known as an SOB [son of a bitch], but there wasn't really anything that I could do or say that was going to—

TS: There was no channel for you to go through to try to write a—

CS: Not really. Not really.

TS: Say, "Look, I've got all these 4.0, and now I'm getting these bad scores." Nothing like that?

CS: Nothing like that.

TS: You didn't have any mentors to help you through?

CS: No. No, the whole time I was in the Marine Corps I didn't really have any female—I did—The women who was my best friend that I was stationed with at Pendleton was a mentor when I was there, but she and I had dropped contact while I was in Albany.

So I ended up being there for a year before I was medically discharged. I had lupus and scleroderma [autoimmune diseases], and I also—they wouldn't let me stay because of the severe depression. So I didn't really have a choice. I would have chosen to have gotten out anyway, but they didn't really give me a choice.

TS: At that time.

CS: Yeah. And when I got out it was really strange to be a civilian for the first time, really, in my life, it felt like.

TS: Yeah, that was probably an interesting transition.

CS: Yeah. Yeah, it was.

TS: What was hard about it?

CS: I didn't know how to fit in the civilian world, and so I got jobs, and I expected people to toe the line and they wouldn't do it.

TS: Be on time.

CS: It was really weird. And I was a little too militaristic for most folks. They were kind of leery of hiring me because I was so "get er' done," and just suck it up, and move on, and do the job, and—

TS: An intensity that wasn't there for a lot of people.

CS: I had a lot of intensity; a lot of intensity. But I got pregnant with my second son in July—June or July of '86, and about that time my husband got stationed at Syracuse [U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Training Center?] to go through their journalism program—the photojournalism program. So we spent a year in Syracuse with me pregnant with my second son, raising a two-year-old.

TS: And he' still in the service?

CS: No, he retired from the service back in—Gosh—2011.

TS: No, I mean, he was in the service at the time.

CS: Oh, he was in the service at the time, yeah.

TS: So it was a special program he could go into?

CS: This was a special program that he went through.

TS: For education—

CS: To make him a combat photographer.

TS: Oh, okay.

CS: He ended up being the military photographer of the year during the Gulf War. So he was really good. Then we got stationed in Norfolk, Virginia.

TS: Okay.

CS: And he was a public affairs officer there. And at that time he went—when the First Gulf War started, he was right there in the breach when they took Kuwait. And a lot of the women—the community was very disconnected. I wasn't living on a military base. I was just out in civilian community, and so there was no circle of women that understood what I was going through, and was also going through it. There was no camaraderie. There was no sense of community around the experience at all.

I remember when they took Kuwait, and CNN [Cable News Network] aired it for, like, four days straight; I don't think I slept the whole time; I watched the whole thing on TV. What helped—It was scary to watch that knowing that he was there, but what helped was that I had a general idea of what kind of work he was doing because I'd been in that field.

TS: Right.

CS: And so, I had a better idea of what my husband did every day than a lot of women had when their husbands where there.

TS: Did you wish you were there at all?

CS: I did. I used to have dreams that they would call me, and say, "We need you," and I'd hop into my military uniform, and there I'd go. [both chuckle] Oh my gosh. Yeah.

TS: Did you get treated for PTSD for yourself?

CS: Yes. Well, eventually I did.

TS: Eventually.

CS: Eventually, I did. Yeah.

TS: Yeah.

CS: Wasn't until years later that I got help for that.

TS: How did that come about?

CS: I was—After we left Norfolk—While we were still in Norfolk, Ernie got orders to Pacific *Stars and Stripes*. And I was going—I was going to undergraduate school trying to finish my undergraduate degree then, and got a chance to go to graduate school, and he wanted me to go to Tokyo, and I was torn because we were having problems in the marriage—

TS: Right.

CS: —and I really wanted to stay and finish my degree, and that was kind of the end of the marriage, was me choosing to stay and finish my degree.

So he left. I went to work in Elizabeth City [NC] while I was in graduate school, running a child advocacy center. And then—I'm getting to your point—

TS: It's okay. Take your time.

CS: What was your question?

TS: How did you end up getting connected with understanding you had PTSD?

CS: Okay.

TS: The treatment.

CS: After I had left the child advocacy center, I went to work for the North Carolina Attorney General's Offices as his Director of Victims Issues, and I was at a Governor's Advisory Commission on Military Affairs meeting—I was on the Governor's Advisory Commission—and I was telling funny stories about the sexual harassment in the military; I'm telling these ha-ha funny stories. And then I looked at the faces of people I was talking to and they were horrified. And I thought, "These stories aren't funny. This is not funny." At that point—

TS: Is that the first recognition that you had of that, really?

CS: Yeah.

TS: For yourself.

CS: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: About what year was that?

CS: That would have been '96.

TS: Okay.

CS: Ninety-six. And so, I started going to the vet [veteran] center—

TS: About a decade after you got out.

CS: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

CS: I started going to the vet center for therapy; group and individual therapy.

TS: Okay.

CS: And that's when I started dealing with the PTSD, and the rape, and everything else that had happened. And then I got hooked up with the VA [Department of Veterans Affairs] system, and I've been getting my cure through the VA ever since, which has been fantastic experience.

TS: So they've been able to cover you for that?

CS: Yes.

TS: That's good.

CS: Yeah.

TS: That's good.

CS: Yeah. It took some doing because, like a lot of people who experience PTSD, I felt like I didn't deserve to get benefits; get compensated for that.

TS: Right.

CS: Because I felt like the people who should be compensated are those who fought in the war, lost a limb, and done all these other things, but when they mess with your psyche—when they mess with your mind, and your sense of who you are, and inhibit your ability to live life fully because you are so damaged by what happened—I mean, that's a human cost; that's a—you paid; I paid for those things.

TS: Is that what you tell other women, and men too, that have had that experience?

CS: Yes. Yes, get help, get into the system, get the VA pension, get the VA benefits to do that, because you earned it. You earned it. You served your country with honor, and you didn't deserve to have that happen to you.

TS: Are there advocates that they can use to help them through the—

CS: The vet centers.

TS: Bureaucracy of that.

CS: The vet centers and things like that.

TS: Yeah.

CS: Yeah, they're—they're really taking it much more seriously now. When I first started working on those issues, they were just coming to grips with the fact that there was sexual harassment in the military, and that these sexual assaults were occurring, and of course, sexual assaults occur in the military about twice the rate as they do in the civilian population. And it's a real problem the military has; a really big problem.

TS: Well, is there any other advice you would give anybody who's had that kind of trauma and experience?

CS: Just recognize that it wasn't your fault. That it wasn't something that you did wrong. It was the people who did those things to you. The people who did those things to you were in the wrong, not you.

[Recording Paused]

TS: Okay, go ahead. Well, there's a couple of things I want to ask you if you don't mind—

CS: Sure.

TS: —about some general overview questions too.

CS: Yes.

TS: Physically, you said the running was hard.

CS: The running was hard.

TS: Emotionally was it, dealing with these kind of, like, toxic environments and sexual harassment.

CS: Yes.

TS: And of course, the rape.

CS: That was the hardest part.

TS: Yeah, just on a daily basis really.

CS: Yeah.

TS: And was it difficult, I guess, dealing with that with your husband too?

CS: I had to keep—I had to bottle it up and keep it inside, because if I had talked to him about all the things that were happening, he would have lost it, and he would have belted somebody, and then he would have gotten in trouble—

TS: So you're trying to protect him by not—

CS: I was trying to protect him, and it was just a bad situation all around. Now, I loved my time in the military, but there were—there was an ugly side to it that a lot of people don't talk about.

TS: Yes. Well, that's something I'd like you to talk about, too, because I think sometimes—I hear a lot that—The number of women that I've talked to that have been raped tell me how much they love the military, and I think for an outsider looking in, they don't get that. They're like, "How can you?" Can you try to help explain that?

CS: Well, yeah, because the military kind of fosters the—kind of the sexist environment, and the masochistic environment, but at the same time there's just this esprit de corps. There's this sense of community and belonging that you have when you are in the military that—there's nothing like it that you will ever experience outside of the military, ever.

So it's got its problems, but the Marine Corps in general is just—it's made up of some of the finest people that are out there. And there are bad apples who will mess it up for some of us, but you have to be a strong person to go in the Marine Corps in the first place, or go in the military in the first place, and you just draw that inner strength to get through what you've got to get through, no matter what the experience is.

TS: What would you say to women, who might say—with dealing—not with the rape—but with the sexual harassment—you're the one in control of that. You have to be the one to push the men off and—

CS: Oh God, my attitude toward—

TS: The whole thing about how boys will be boys.

CS: My attitude is so different toward that now because—

TS: How would you respond to that, then?

CS: Back then, I responded to it by being—by acting like a victim; by succumbing to it; by being overwhelmed by it. Now I would not brook any of that crap. Ever since I got this attitude of go ahead and try it, nobody's ever messed with me since. The weight helps. [chuckles] People stay away from me because I'm older and I weigh more, but if I'd had that kind of attitude back then, very little of what happened would have happened. I'm not blaming myself. I'm not blaming the victim in any way. I'm just saying that I—with the attitude I have now, I would not let somebody infringe on my boundaries in any way without calling them on it. Doesn't mean I could have stopped everything from happening, but my recruiter would not have happened, I'm certain of it. I'm certain if I had said to him, "Who do you think you are? What do you think you're doing? Stop now," that it wouldn't have happened. Unfortunately, I was not emotionally in a place to be able to be that strong. But again, I'm not blaming me or any other victim at all. It's just that's where I was at the time.

TS: You were in a vulnerable position.

CS: Right.

TS: And the person knew it.

CS: But over the years, I took my power back, and I became an advocate for others who had been victimized. And that's why I do what I do today with my current company.

TS: And what's your current company called?

CS: It's called Tiger Eye Sensor, Inc., and I'm invented this device—this is just a dummy device—but I've invented this device called the Tiger Eye Security Sensor, and its disguised as a piece of jewelry, but when you call it for help—you wear it on your chest just like a piece of jewelry—when you call it for help it links you with a live operator who calls police to your GPS [Global Positioning System] location and warns the perpetrator to leave.

TS: Oh, wow.

CS: And at the same time, it photographs and audio records the perpetrator, and sends the data to the cloud so they can identify and capture him later.

TS: That's all in here?

CS: All in there.

TS: Wow. Where's the camera?

CS: Well, that's just a dummy device right there.

TS: Oh. But where would the camera be on there?

CS: It would just be in the front.

TS: In the front?

CS: Yeah.

TS: Very interesting.

CS: And we're bringing up to market now.

TS: So it's like a safety device.

CS: Yes.

TS: But also has a response to it too.

CS: Yeah. You have two-way voice with a live operator who walks you through the situation and makes sure that you're taken care of. And this is my response to what happened to me.

TS: To help others to not have to—

CS: To help others to avoid being assaulted.

TS: Yeah.

CS: Yeah.

TS: Now, when your dad was talking to you back before you went in and was all excited, did he warn you at all about how you might be treated by other men?

CS: The only sex talk my parents ever gave me was before I went into boot camp. My father was driving me to the airport—or after boot camp when I was going to photojournalism school—he was driving me to the airport, and he said—he was so uncomfortable, poor guy—he said, "You're going to be around a lot of guys, and you might want to think about birth control." And that was the whole thing he said.

TS: That was the talk?

CS: That's all my parent ever taught me about sex. [both chuckle] And he was right.

TS: Now, what about your brothers, because they were both Marines; two of them, right?

CS: No, they didn't warn me.

TS: No, but I mean, have you ever had this conversation with them about—

CS: Oh, they know. They know about the stuff that happened. My dad doesn't really know because he—he started getting old in his fifties, and he loves the Corps so much that it would break his heart if he knew all of the stuff that had happened to me.

TS: So you don't tell him?

CS: I don't tell him.

TS: Yeah, but your brothers know?

CS: My brothers know.

TS: And what do they say about the atmosphere with the men and the women, and that sort of thing? Do they ever talk about that?

CS: My twin brother is the one I'm closest to, and he—he understands how hard it was. He understands how hard it was, and why it took its toll on me the way it did. Because he was in the same years that I was in.

TS: What did he do?

CS: He was a court reporter.

TS: Oh, okay, so he was in not just a male job.

CS: Yeah, he was a court reporter so he was not—he worked for the Judge Advocate [General Corps].

TS: Okay. I was just wondering about that because you have such a connection to the Marine Corps, and with family, I was wondering how they would respond to the way that you were treated.

CS: I am very proud that I was a Marine.

TS: Yeah.

CS: And even though it had its really dark days, and its dark times, nothing will ever take that pride away.

TS: What are you most proud of?

CS: What am I the most proud of the Marine Corps?

TS: Your most memorable experience; something like that.

CS: I am most proud that I was able to do everything that was ever asked of me with excellence. I was an expert marksman. I got first class in all of my physical fitness tests. No matter what they asked of me I gave 100%. So I was in the toughest service—no offense.

TS: [chuckles] None taken.

CS: I was in the toughest service giving it everything I had, and I gave the best I had, and it was good. It was good.

TS: Do you have a memorable moment or anything like that? Besides slipping back into your shoe, which I think was pretty impressive. [both chuckle]

CS: When I graduated from boot camp and I could see my father sobbing on the general's shoulder.

TS: Knowing he was so proud.

CS: And knowing that he was just busting with pride. He was just beyond proud.

TS: Yeah.

CS: He—That was one of the highlights of my life, was making my father that proud.

TS: Now, did you ever earn any kind of award or certificate?

CS: Yeah, I got commendations. I didn't get any medals or anything like that, we were in peace time, but I got commendations, and I was—won awards for my writing; my journalism and stuff like that.

TS: Oh, nice. Do you still have copies of the things that you won?

CS: Yes, I do.

TS: We would love to have some of those.

CS: I do still have copies of some of those papers.

TS: Really?

CS: I have to find them because—

TS: That would be great to have in your collection.

CS: They won't do me any good. My kids aren't going to go back and reread my articles.

TS: Well, if you put them in the archive that would be a great place—

CS: Okay.

TS: If you think about it. If that's something you want to do.

CS: Okay.

TS: It would be great to have them.

CS: That would be good.

TS: Did you have any other special training when you were in?

CS: No, just the journalism—the photojournalism. I did decide at one point that I wanted to go on a south—it was either an Artic or Antarctic expedition as the—they needed a photographer to go, and I guess I was bored and looking for something new to do, and so I decided I wanted to do that, and thank God they didn't send me. [both chuckle] Instead they sent me to get my photojournalism certificate.

TS: Oh, okay.

CS: God, I would have been miserable if I'd gone there.

TS: Did you go on any deployments or TDY's [temporary duty] or anything at all?

CS: No, women didn't do that back then.

TS: Not at that time.

CS: No, but the women—my best friend, Tracy, that you're going to interview, she took on—she has an amazing story to tell about how she went on a deployment with the guys, when women never did that, and almost died.

TS: Really, what year approximately? Like in the eighties?

CS: Eighty-three.

TS: Okay. No, I would love to hear her story.

CS: It's an amazing story.

TS: Now, do you have any particular heroes or heroines during your time that you were in the service that you admired? Doesn't have to be a military person.

CS: General Robinson, who was the commander of the base I was at; I can't remember what his first name was. I remember when I got married to my first husband, he and his wife sent us a wedding—I sent him an invitation to the wedding, and they sent us a wedding gift. I thought it was just really cool.

TS: That's really nice.

CS: My friend Tracy, who—I still dream about the Marine Corps a lot, and Tracy's in my dreams, the Marine Corps in my dreams, and I'm going back to boot camp, and I'm like, "Oh, God, not boot camp again." [chuckles] So the Marine Corps is still very much a part of life.

TS: What do you admire about Tracy?

CS: She is the most poised, articulate woman I know. She is just physically and emotionally —and beautiful inside and out. She's just absolutely beautiful. And when she was working with the media, for example, she knew how to manage the media, and say the appropriate things. I'd get up there, and say just damn near anything. They never wanted to put me in front of the media because I would say, "Oh yeah, they were smoking pot [marijuana] when the tank went over the cliff. Yeah." [both chuckle]

And Tracy would be like, "That's still under investigation." She's just very skilled and appropriate—

TS: Yeah.

CS: —and very talented.

TS: How long did she serve?

CS: She served for ten or twelve years. She ended up becoming a warrant officer.

TS: Okay.

CS: But she taught me so much about being a woman, and about being a Marine, and being a woman Marine.

TS: Would you consider her your mentor, then?

CS: Yes, I would.

TS: Yeah.

CS: Yeah, she definitely was.

TS: Yeah.

CS: And is today. The cool thing is that I lost touch with Tracy, and figured that she got remarried over the years, and the only thing I knew was that her daughter should be ready to get her driver's license. And the very first day I got Internet in my office—the Attorney General's office in 1995—I called in a favor with a friend, and said look for this young woman's name in the driver's license database, and it found her the day after she got her license.

TS: Oh my gosh!

CS: And so, I was able to get the information. I called Tracy, and we've just been thick as thieves [emotionally close] ever since.

TS: Oh, that's great.

CS: She moved to North Carolina so—

TS: Oh, where does she live?

CS: In Liberty.

TS: In Liberty.

CS: We see each other all the time.

TS: Oh, that'd be great. That's really nice that you reconnected like that.

CS: Yeah.

TS: That's great. Back to politics a little. So you're in, [President Ronald Wilson] Reagan was starting—

CS: Reagan was just coming into office.

TS: So he was shot when you were—

CS: Yeah.

TS: Or just before, or just after you went in?

CS: Just after.

TS: Yeah. What'd you think about him?

CS: That's why I said I would have taken a bullet for Ronnie Reagan.

TS: Yeah.

[On March 30, 1981, an attempt was made to assassinate President Ronald Reagan in Washington, D.C. President Reagan and three others were shot and wounded by John Hinckley Jr. Hinckley's motivation for the attack was to impress actress Jodie Foster, over whom he had developed an obsession after seeing her in the 1976 film *Taxi Driver*]

CS: And now I'm such a liberal, I mean, I—[chuckles]

TS: How do you square that?

CS: I consider it evolution. [both chuckle] Other people—like my family—would consider it devolution, because my family is still extremely conservative. I'm like the crazy left winger in the family right now.

TS: Well, what were some tipping points that tipped you to a way that was different from how you were raised? Or maybe not different, just you have a different perspective on things.

CS: Yeah. When I—I told you I've lived here since [contracting] scleroderma, and I was able to work off and on over the years, and in 2000 I finally had to stop working completely because I was so debilitated; I couldn't lift a cup of coffee or turn a door knob; I had to go up and down the stairs on my hands and knees. And by 2002 I was so desperately ill they told me I was going to die; that I had developed a terminal heart condition. And I was terrified, and I was depressed. I curled up into a little ball and waited to die.

And after about twelve months of feeling really, really sorry for myself, I got the chance to meet with a Tibetan Buddhist Lama. And I went to the Lama, and I poured out my tale of woe, and that's when I learned that "Lamas don't do dramas".

TS: [chuckles]

CS: Because the Lama looked at me fiercely, but kindly, and said, "Stop feeling sorry for yourself, and think about the happiness of other people."

And I said, "I can't take care of myself, how can I help anybody else?"

And he insisted, "Stop thinking about yourself, and think about the happiness of other people."

And on the way home I'm thinking, "What can I possibly do in my debilitated state?" But an ambulance went with the siren blaring, and I said a quick wish that they would find help and healing, and I thought, "Well, that was simple. I can do that."

So I started sending love to people in the cars around me, and letting drivers go ahead of me in the lane, and letting the mom go ahead of me in line at the grocery store—the mom with the crying baby—and I started doing daily acts of kindness. Intentional

acts of kindness. I would give my cane to a woman who was struggling to walk, and bought a tank of gas for a woman who didn't have enough gas to get to work the next day, and just little things that I was capable of doing. And I got happier, and the more I did, the happier I got, until it reached a place where I was so filled with joy, and gratitude that it just didn't matter whether I sick or ill, or even living or dying. I was just happy.

At that point my condition went into remission, and over the years of dealing with this illness and dealing with really examining—really going through this deep self-examination of what—of the traumas that had happened to me, and what was important to me, and who I was authentically, I just came to a softer place. A gentler place that is about love and healing, and not war and combat, and—I just don't think anybody should have to go to combat. I don't think any war should have to be fought. That sounds unrealistic, and it probably is, but that's why I'm inventing things like the Tiger Eye Security Sensor, because there's got to be a way to at least make a dent. We can do better than we're doing right now. And I'm—I want to be part of that.

TS: That's really powerful, yeah. Okay so when you were in—'81—so '83 was a Marine bombing in—

CS: In Beirut.

[The 1983 Beirut barracks bombing were terrorist attacks that took place in Beirut, Lebanon during the Lebanese Civil War. Two bombs simultaneously stuck separate buildings that were housing Multinational Force in Lebanon peacekeepers. The attack specifically targeted American and French service workers, and resulted in the deaths of 241 American and 58 French peacekeepers, six civilians, and the two suicide bombers]

TS: Yes.

CS: Yes.

TS: Do you remember that?

CS: I do remember that. I remember watching on TV when the news reports came in, yeah.

TS: What were you thinking about that?

CS: Oh, I—I was just—

TS: Was that back when you were, like, ready to go out?

CS: Oh yeah, I was ready to go out there and take care of the whole thing myself.

TS: Yeah.

CS: Yeah.

TS: So when you see those kind of things today, what do you think?

CS: I don't have the anger, I don't have the desire for revenge. I feel compassion for everybody involved, and I say prayers for everybody involved, and I just keep wishing and hoping that we're evolving as a species; that we'll get to a point where we don't have to treat each other like this.

TS: What if somebody came to you and said they wanted to join the service?

CS: If they wanted to join the service?

TS: Yeah. Marine Corps or any of the services?

CS: I would encourage them to join the service. I think it's really good. If I was talking to a young woman who was going to join the service, I would sit her down, and say, "Okay, these are some of the things you might encounter, and here's how you respond." I would give her a heads up.

TS: Right, just straight out.

CS: Yes, make sure she knows that she's got to set clear boundaries, and how to defend herself, and how to respond appropriately to the situations that might occur.

TS: What about the issue of, right now, women in combat? Do you think that there's a job woman can't do even if you're opposed to—

CS: I don't think there's a job woman can't do. It's a matter of whether I think—

TS: Anyone should.

CS: —anyone should do it, exactly. I don't think anybody should go into combat. I think it's so damaging to the psyche, and we're seeing that with the PTSD cases that are coming up. It's so damaging, and nobody wins; nobody wins.

TS: When you were in they didn't have "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

CS: No.

TS: Then they had it, and it was repealed. What do you think about that whole issue of homosexuals in the military?

CS: Well, there were—there were very obviously a lot of lesbians that were not too quiet about that when I was in, and that was—

TS: In the Marine Corps?

CS: In the Marine Corps. Which was fine until they went on a witch hunt, and then they drummed a lot of them out of the military. They would go through periods were they would do the—just everything's fine, and then all of a sudden this witch hunt would happen, and they'd get rid of a whole bunch of them, and then everything's fine. It's very tragic because I think about some of the women that I served with who were very capable Marines who got drummed out of the military because they were lesbians, and it just wasn't right.

TS: Did you ever—

CS: We didn't know about homosexuals but—

TS: You didn't what?

CS: We didn't know about the men.

TS: No?

CS: No.

TS: Not in the Marine Corps.

CS: Not in the Marine Corps.

TS: Did you ever have to cover any of that for your—

CS: Oh, God, no! [both chuckle] No, they would never let us cover anything like that.

TS: No?

CS: No.

TS: Not even like a trial or anything—

CS: No.

TS: —going on like that?

CS: No.

TS: Interesting. And so, as far as how you were treated for pay and promotions, until your last assignment, you felt like you were doing really well and you were treated fairly.

CS: Yes.

TS: Is that accurate to say?

CS: Yes.

TS: What about the treatment of your peers and co-workers? How do you feel?

CS: I feel they treated me very fairly. Other than not being able to go on certain assignments because "a guy should do that" or "a woman shouldn't do that", which was very frustrating for me when that would happen, I think everything was pretty much—pretty much fair.

TS: You talked just briefly about how when you came back and transitioned to civilian life. How did you feel you were treated? At work it's that intensity and like—

CS: Yeah.

TS: —looking at the clock, and why aren't—

CS: Yeah.

TS: I think one of my friends has described it to me as like when you're doing a job, and the clock ticks to 5:00 [p.m.], and you're still doing the job, why aren't you finishing it?

CS: Yes.

TS: People pack up and leave, and that was kind of difficult for him.

CS: Yes.

TS: Was that something that you experienced? Things like that.

CS: Well, I learned that when I wanted a job that I would have to go in in advance. Like, when I wanted the job at the Attorney General's office, after my interview I went downstairs and met my co-workers, and—my would-be co-workers—and introduced myself, and laughed, and talked to them, and everything, and showed them that I was a human being. And I found out later that that was a good thing I did that because they were going to tell their boss—our boss—that they didn't want her to hire me because they didn't want a marine sergeant coming in and telling them what to do. There was just this image of this marine coming in and barking orders at everybody. Well, I was a pussy cat, but they didn't know that.

TS: Right, so they had like this stereotype of what you would be if you were on the job. I see.

CS: Yeah.

TS: You talked about the VA, and I think you talked about using your—well you didn't use—you got your education—

CS: Yes, through Voc-Rehab [Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment]

TS: Through the Voc-Rehab. And have you used your GI [Bill] for a mortgage or anything like that?

CS: I got—Yes, I used the home mortgage.

TS: Okay.

CS: The military's been very good to me. The VA's been very good to me. I'm very happy with the care I've received. I've had an occasional bad doctor here and there, but I just swap them out for a better one.

TS: Yeah, you feel free to be able to do it.

CS: I know how to advocate for myself, yeah.

TS: Well, would you consider yourself a trailblazer, a pioneer, or anything like that?

CS: Yes.

TS: Yeah.

CS: Yeah, I would.

TS: Explain why you think—

CS: Aside from the fact that I was in the first platoon of women that had the combat training, I just feel like I've always been pushing the envelope in terms of what was allowable and what wasn't for women, and for people in general.

TS: What kind of things did you do that were, like, pushing the envelope?

CS: Like when I was with the Attorney General's office, I heard about a city wide program, and wanted to—I asked if it had ever been done statewide, and they said no. So I went to the Attorney General and I said, "Let's do this program statewide." And he said yes. So we implemented this statewide program that became the national model by the U.S. Department of Justice.

TS: So you are just always pushing, and advocating, and things like that.

CS: Yes.

TS: That's good. And do you think that was something that was always in you or did the Marine Corps help develop that kind of—

CS: Both.

TS: Both?

CS: It was in me, but the Marine Corps did help develop that. I learned—It's funny, because you have a lot more autonomy—or I had a lot more autonomy in the role I was in in the Marine Corps then a lot of people think you might.

TS: Do you think that's a misunderstanding people have about those who join the service; that they're not just lemmings.

CS: Yeah, I think it is a misunderstanding people have. Maybe it's because I was in public affairs where we have a lot more latitude to think about—to suggest story ideas and stuff like that. So maybe it's different for other people, I don't know.

TS: Do you think there's anything else that civilians may not understand or appreciate about being in the military?

CS: I think they have this bad perception about people with PTSD. That they're going to go postal any second; go sniping people from a bell tower somewhere. And that hurts military folks who are looking for jobs when they get out of service.

[Going postal, in American English slang, means becoming extremely and uncontrollably angry, often to the point of violence, and usually in a workplace environment.]

TS: You think that's a big barrier?

CS: Yeah, it is.

TS: Yeah.

CS: I'm the president of the North Carolina Veteran's Business Association, and we hear this a lot from our constituents.

TS: How can that be overcome, do you think?

CS: It just takes experience. It takes being around people with PTSD, and seeing that they're not—it doesn't help that there's the occasional story about somebody with PTSD who then goes postal and does something, and kind of reinforces the stereotype.

TS: They don't hear about all the other cases where that's not happening.

CS: That's right.

TS: Right.

CS: That's right.

TS: Well, how do you think your life has been different because you joined the Marine Corps?

CS: Well, I think it's better. I think it—I think I'm a better person overall. I'm certainly more disciplined. I'm certainly more determined, and better at committing to things. It straightened me up when I was twenty. It really—

TS: Yeah?

CS: Yeah, it really did, because I didn't know what I was going to do with myself back then. I had no idea where I was going, and who I was, and what I was going to do. If I hadn't gone into the Marine Corps I might be the manager at the Dairy Queen in Mena, Arkansas right now. Which is not my ideas of success.

TS: I'm not so sure that would have been the result [both chuckle] after talking with you, but okay. And now you have two sons?

CS: Two sons and two grandchildren.

TS: And if your sons wanted to join, what would you say to them?

CS: That's a lot harder. My younger son did try to join the Marine Corps, and went to a party the night before boot camp and smoked some pot, and when he was in boot camp for a month—he was kicking butt in boot camp, he loved it; the drill instructors loved him—they got the results back from his tests and they kicked him out. He was heartbroken.

TS: I bet.

CS: Heartbroken. I was heartbroken for him, because it would have done—but now I'm glad. Now I'm glad, because then the war really kicked up, and things started happening, and I don't want my kids to go through that.

TS: Right.

CS: I don't mind them being in the military, but I don't want them being in combat.

TS: Well, what does patriotism mean to you?

CS: I have a problem with patriotism when it turns into nationalism. I think that's a disease. I think that when people—I think patriotism can be a very good thing. When you love your country, and you love what it does, but when it turns to nationalism, and you think your country is better than other countries, and that that gives you the right to push other countries around, then I have a problem with it. But patriotism is—to me, means pride in where you're from, and I think we have an incredible country. I think we live in an amazing country. I don't think it's necessarily the best country in the whole wide world. I think that's all relative. But I feel tremendous pride in the country, and great patriotism, without that bleeding into fanatical desire to think everybody's against us, and who's not with us. You know what I mean? I have room for people who are different from us without taking that personally and thinking that we got to fight them because they're different from us. That's probably a very different answer then you've got from a lot of people. [chuckles]

TS: It is. In a lot of ways, it is. Would you do it again?

CS: Oh, yeah.

TS: Yeah.

CS: I would. I would do it this time if I could know what I know now about taking care of myself.

TS: Right.

CS: And then I wouldn't have had 99% of the problems I had.

TS: But we can't.

CS: We can't.

TS: We can't go back.

CS: No, but I see the purpose it served. I chose to turn that experience into something that served me, that made me stronger.

TS: Yeah. Well, I don't have any other formal questions. Is there anything that we haven't discussed that you wanted to cover, that you can think of?

CS: No, I don't think so. I just—I really appreciate the opportunity to be part of the oral history project because I love the idea of my kids and grandkids being able to hear about that experience, because it's not a part of me they know.

TS: No?

CS: My friend Tracy, one of the reason's we're so close is because we hold each other's secrets. We knew each other thirty-five years ago when we were sergeants in the Marine Corps, and nobody else has that part of us.

TS: Right.

CS: Except the other. My second husband never knew me in the military and he thought I could kill him with one finger. I never disabused him of that notion. [both chuckling]

TS: Was he in the service?

CS: No. No, far from it.

TS: Well, we're really glad to have you as part of the collection.

CS: Thank you so much.

TS: Thanks for letting me come and talk to you today.

CS: I really appreciate it.

TS: Alright. Well, thank you CJ.

[End of Interview]